

Released From Fear

by Mark Jarvinen

Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

³¹ Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

³³ “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

*³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” **(Mark 3:20-35 – NIV)***

INTRODUCTION

Today, I begin with an offbeat question: “Who invented the sandwich?” The truth is, nobody knows for sure, but according to my internet research, the man who popularized and gave his name to it was Englishman,

John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, who one day in 1762, was engaged in a rousing 24-hour gambling session. Rather than leave the poker table, he requested that some salt beef be placed between two slices of bread in order to sustain him during his marathon card game.

Today's text introduces us to a different kind of sandwich. I'm referring to the first example of **Mark's literary technique** of bracketing, a.k.a. "**sandwiching**," in which the narration begins with one story, but is interrupted by another, before concluding with the original story to make a similar point. First, having heard of Jesus' exploits involving healing and miracles, **his family** leaves Nazareth and makes haste to Capernaum in order to conduct a type of intervention with him, saying "**he is out of his mind.**" The interruption to this story involves the "**teachers of the law**" from Jerusalem, who had also gotten wind of Jesus' dynamic ministry and arrived in Capernaum claiming that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub (Satan). After citing Jesus' rebuttal to the teachers' ridiculous charge, the action shifts back to Jesus' family arriving in Capernaum to take him away. While Jesus was inside speaking to a number of his followers, the family sends a messenger to Jesus, to ask him to come outside. Jesus simply ignores them and instructs his followers on the true meaning of "family," from a Kingdom perspective. This "sandwiching" technique allows the two separate stories to make a similar point.

THEIR POINT OF SIMILARITY

Prior to this incident, Jesus had just started his earthly ministry. He had gathered 12 disciples and was touring the countryside, healing people and

casting out demons. Everywhere he went, large crowds gathered, asking, **“Who is this Man?”** It appeared to the masses that a new spiritual movement had begun, leaving people either hopeful, or fearful of what it might bring. **Based on the reactions of both Jesus’ own family and the teachers of the law to Jesus’ growing popularity, we deduce that both groups were fearful.** Perhaps Jesus’ family feared that they would all be subjected to social ridicule, or even excommunication from the Temple. Maybe they were genuinely fearful that Jesus would be harmed for his radical beliefs and actions. Whatever the case, in their view, Jesus must be stopped and protected from himself by bringing him home.

The stakes seemed potentially greater for the teachers of the law, who may have feared political repercussions on a large scale from the Roman government. Or, selfishly, they may have feared losing their own important standing in the Jewish establishment. Either way, the teachers of the law had likely drawn the same conclusion as Jesus’ family - he must be stopped.

WHERE DID FEAR ORIGINATE?

To answer this, we must go back to **Genesis 3**, back to the Garden of Eden, the passage from which today’s OT lesson is drawn. There, Satan whispered into the ears of Adam and Eve that they could have whatever they wanted in life if they would simply ignore what God had forbidden and eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This they did, and things have never been the same. Sin entered the world, leading to

separation between God and the human race. Who instigated this separation? Satan, the father of lies and the prince of darkness. What tactic did Satan use to lead to this separation? Certainly he appealed to their pride, tempting them to doubt God's Word. But he also used **FEAR** - fear that God would leave them powerless and alone unless they took matters into their own hands. **Was there any reason for Adam and Eve to fear?** No! God had already proven Himself faithful to them by being their source of life and blessing. Even after Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit, this Source of life and blessing, the God of grace and mercy, came walking through the Garden looking for them. **Why?** God had said they would surely die if they ate of the tree. Yet, in **Genesis 3** we also learn of God's Gospel promise to show them His love and forgiveness. **What did they do?** They hid from Him. **Why did they hide?** Satan created fear and shame in them to keep them separated from the God of love and forgiveness. Here's what's amazing. Even though the world has drastically changed since the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and people's natural inclination is to hide from God in fear and rebellion, the Holy Spirit continues to seek those who are still in hiding from God, and to rescue and forgive them by faith in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again on their behalf.

TAKING IT FURTHER

In **v. 22** of our text, the teachers of the law make a ridiculous assertion against Jesus, saying,

“He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

To this, in **vv. 24-26** Jesus makes a very logical and astute observation by saying:

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

In other words, **why would Satan cast out his own minions?** His whole kingdom would collapse. It goes to show that when desperation and fear take hold, very often irrational thinking and actions follow. The accusation against Jesus, brought by the teachers of the Law, was ludicrous. It illustrates their fear of the **“new wine”** of Jesus’ Spirit-led ministry that was bursting the **“old wineskins”** of their religion, based on tradition and legalism. For the teachers of the Law to make such an accusation was nothing short of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – attributing to Satan that which is of God. For such blasphemy there can be no forgiveness. According to **v. 29**, this was an **“eternal sin.”**

MEET THE STRONGER MAN

Mixed into the narrative is a cryptic reference to a **“strong man”** in **v. 27**, which reads:

“In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man.”

The preceding context in **v. 26**, in which **“a house divided against itself... cannot stand,”** is a clear reference to **“Satan’s house,”** or Satan’s kingdom. Therefore, the strong man’s house in **v. 27** must also refer to Satan’s house.

Thus, plainly, the “**strong man**” in **v. 27** is none other than Satan himself. We’ve already learned that it would be nonsense for the strong man, or Satan, to rob his own house. In fact, the only way Satan’s house could ever be robbed and his possessions be carried off would be if a **stronger man**, whose identity is only implied in the text, would enter Satan’s house by force, tie up Satan, the strong man, and take for himself the strong man’s or Satan’s possessions. **Who is this stronger man, who binds Satan and robs him of his possessions?** It is none other than **Jesus Christ**, who laid claim to the lives of those who had previously lived under the dominion of sin, death, and the power of Satan, by dying on the cross in payment for the sins of the world, and on the third day rising to resurrection life. In this veiled, parabolic fashion, Jesus introduces Himself as the Messiah, the Rescuer from sin, and the Giver of eternal life to all who trust in Him. Jesus is our stronger man today!

MEET YOUR TRUE FAMILY

Finally, in the last layer of our sandwich, we are led by Mark to the arrival of Jesus’ family – his mother, Mary, and his brothers. Family, one’s own flesh and blood, meant everything in Jewish tradition and culture. Yet, in **v. 31**, notice that when they arrived where Jesus was, they remained “**standing outside.**” Perhaps they didn’t want to embarrass Jesus in front of his friends, but it’s significant that when they sent word inside to get Jesus, he ignored them. Instead he instructed those gathered around him asking, “**Who are my mother and my brothers?**” (**v. 33**). Looking around the circle of his friends, he answered his own question – “**Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.**”

Going back to the Day of Pentecost, when Jesus’ followers declared the mighty works of God in the many tongues of those assembled in Jerusalem,

gathered from many nations, it was clear that God was doing a new thing. God was making a new people for himself of every tribe, nation, and tongue. Jesus is teaching along the same line in today's text. Although Jesus didn't disown his own family, or regard them as no longer important to him, it's key to note that he remained inside with those interested in doing God's will, calling them his brothers and sisters and mother. **What is it to do God's will?** As recorded in John's Gospel, it is simply ***"to believe on Jesus, the one whom the Father sent."***

CONCLUSION

What does that mean for us? Only by believing in Jesus or being born of the Spirit, not by being descendants of church-going parents or grandparents, are we of the true family of God. It's not our flesh and blood lineage that makes us the family of God, but our common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that all of us sitting together here this morning, who trust in Jesus as our Savior, are true brothers and sisters. We are part of one, big, unified family of God, who love and belong to each other, sharing life together and looking to introduce others to this shared life in Christ. **With this shared life in Christ we are released from all that causes fear in our lives.** During his ministry on earth, Jesus daily delivered people from their fears and thus gave them life. He fed those who feared hunger, he healed those who feared their illness, he gave friendship to those who feared loneliness, and he even raised his friend Lazarus from the grave as a portend of His own resurrection, which of course addresses our fear of death itself. Because of Jesus and His resurrection, our fear of being forgotten in our graves is vanquished through the promise of a life in heaven that continues for all eternity with him and all who are our brothers and sisters through faith in him. **A-men.**